



STATE OF NEVADA
Department of Conservation & Natural Resources
DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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For Immediate Release:
March 8, 2006

NEWS RELEASE

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NEW MERCURY AIR EMISSIONS CONTROL PROGRAM APPROVED

RENO—The State Environmental Commission (SEC) this evening unanimously approved the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection's (NDEP) proposed Mercury Air Emissions Control Program for precious metal mining operations.

"The Nevada Mercury Air Emissions Control Program is the first regulatory program in the nation to control mercury emissions from precious metal mining," NDEP Administrator Leo Drozdoff said. "The program takes the control of mercury emissions from precious metals mining to a new level. Our ability to develop a regulatory program of this magnitude and on such an aggressive schedule would not have been possible without the cooperation of the regulated industry as well as environmental groups and many concerned stakeholders."

The newly approved regulatory program builds upon a successful five-year voluntary program in which mercury emissions were reduced by more than 80 percent at the five largest emissions sources in the state. Most significantly, the new program is a State of Nevada regulatory program, which includes permitting and enforcement provisions. The program also differs from the voluntary program in that it requires: enhanced monitoring, testing, recordkeeping and reporting; expanded coverage to *all* precious metal mining operations; a requirement for improved and additional controls; and regulation down to the unit level rather than by facility.

Nevada is home to large areas of naturally occurring mercury, as well as man-made sources, including gold and silver mines and electricity generating plants. The main environmental concern is that mercury emissions could be depositing in lakes and streams, where it can accumulate in the tissues of fish. While bioaccumulation in fish is the primary concern, the health affects in humans who ingest too much fish containing mercury can include neurological damage and danger to pregnant women and their fetuses, as well as young children.

While a federal standard for mercury air emissions from metal mining operations has never been set, the NDEP along with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, developed the voluntary program in 2002 to reduce mercury air emissions from four major gold mining operations. According to EPA, the most recent report indicates annual mercury air emissions are at 3,755 pounds, a reduction of 17,343 pounds from the program's 2001 baseline emissions of 21,098 pounds.

"Although it's well known that the Western United States is affected by mercury from long-range and regional sources, much more research needs to be done to identify specific sources of mercury emissions, how the mercury travels through the environment, and what its potential impacts might be on health and the environment," said Leo Drozdoff, administrator of NDEP. "Such research, while vital, could take many years and cost many millions of dollars. That's why NDEP remains focused on its goal to control mercury air emissions at these known sources and to minimize their impacts to the environment through this regulatory program."

(more)

Mercury Regulations
Add 1-1-1-1

Drozdoff emphasized that approval of the regulations is just the next step in a dynamic and open regulatory process. As new information becomes available and sound scientific research is concluded, his agency would be open to revisiting the regulations and making specific changes that might be warranted, he noted.

“The Nevada Mercury Air Emissions Control Program addresses an area that we at NDEP can control—regulation of mercury air emissions from thermal units at precious metal mining operations,” NDEP Deputy Administrator Colleen Cripps said. “We believe it’s a big step in the right direction.”

NDEP Chief, Bureau of Air Pollution Control Michael Elges said, “This regulatory program calls for an aggressive schedule of activities necessary to develop a case-by-case maximum achievable control technology, called MACT for mercury controls in Nevada.”

For more information on the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection mercury control program, visit our Web site at <http://ndep.nv.gov/mercury.htm>

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